

MAIN ACTIVITIES ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

A. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OUTLOOK

For more than thirty years, the Continuous Reporting System on Migration (known by its French acronym SOPEMI) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been producing an annual report. In 1992, the report first appeared as a flagship publication of the OECD under the title “Trends in International Migration”. In 2006, the thirtieth edition of the annual report had a much broader analytical scope and was given a new title, International Migration Outlook, to reflect the growing importance of international migration in a context of accelerating economic globalization and population ageing.

The 2007 edition of the International Migration Outlook includes two special chapters on the education of immigrants (Matching educational background and employment: A challenge for immigrants in host countries) and on the international mobility of health professionals (Immigrant health workers in OECD countries in the broader context of highly skilled migration). The first part of the report provides a broad overview of trends in international migration movements, including a historical overview of migration over the last half century and a look at potential movements in response to future declines in the working age population. Net migration to OECD countries has tripled since the early 1970s, with movements often driven by historical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall. Asylum seeking is at a historical low level since the early 1990s, while the accession of the new members of the European Union in 2004 has resulted in a substantial increase in movements within Europe. Significant labour migration into Southern Europe continues, most of it from outside OECD countries. The integration of immigrants and their children continues to be of concern in many countries. For the first time the report provides a comparative analysis of labour force outcomes for children of immigrants in 10 OECD countries. The report also contains an overview of recent developments in migration policies, which includes a review of changes in migration restrictions with regard to European Union enlargement countries, new measures to facilitate the migration of the highly-skilled and the growing importance of migration issues in international relations.

B. OECD ACTIVITIES ON MIGRATION STATISTICS

In recent years, the OECD Secretariat has devoted intense efforts to improve the international availability and comparability of migration statistics regarding of immigrant stocks and immigration flows. More recently, the OECD Secretariat has been also working on statistics on return migration.

1. Population census and register data

A few years ago, the OECD using census data from national statistical offices launched a data collection effort focusing on the number of foreign-born and native-born. The objective of the project was to better measure and characterize foreign-born populations and especially to obtain, by aggregating across OECD receiving countries, data on expatriates by country of origin.

The first phase of the data collection involved gathering internationally comparable data by detailed place of birth and education level, which then allowed estimating emigration rates to OECD countries by

level of qualification and country of origin for approximately 100 countries. This analysis provided a broad view of the movements of the highly-educated for both OECD and developing countries, confronting the conventional wisdom on the emigration of skilled professionals with actual data. The results have been widely disseminated and shared in many international forums and the data have been made available to the international community through the OECD website¹.

As initially agreed between participating countries and the Secretariat, a second phase of data collection was launched aimed at gathering additional information on demographic (age, gender, duration of stay) and labour market characteristics (labour market status, occupation, sector of activity) by detailed place of birth and educational level (including fields of study). Collecting data at this level of detail for about 30 countries is a lengthy process which has necessitated interaction between the Secretariat and participating countries. The second phase of the project was only recently completed and the Secretariat is currently preparing a publication that summarises this information (forthcoming early 2008) (Dumont, Martin and Speilvogel, 2007).

2. Immigration flows to OECD countries²

The 2006 edition of the International Migration Outlook includes, for the first time, statistics on long-term immigration flows that have been standardized across countries. In so doing, the OECD Secretariat has had to deviate for many countries from the usual statistics on international migration that are used nationally either published by the OECD or other organizations, for the following reasons. First, it is still currently difficult to harmonize statistics of international migration flows according to the United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration (United Nations, 1998) using the standard national sources, for reasons which have been documented in Lemaître (2005). Second, these sources also do not generally include information on the nature of migration flows, that is, whether they are for work, family, humanitarian or other reasons (Lemaître, 2005). Although most long-term immigrants can enter the labour market once they have been admitted to the receiving country, empirical results have shown that labour market outcomes vary by migration category. In fact, differences in migration categories might in part explain differences in migrant economic and social outcomes across countries. Third, many of the standard national sources tend to group some short-term movements with long-term flows making it difficult to distinguish them, although this issue is of interest for policy.

Three objectives have guided most of the choices discussed above: (a) international comparability; (b) the need for statistics on long-term migration, and (c) the possibility of disaggregating data by category of migration. Taken together, these three objectives have determined why data by place of residence are often used in studies focusing on international migration. If the aim had been to develop measures of immigration flows compatible with population totals for use in demographic accounting, one might have made different choices, and indeed there is a strong argument to be made for continuing the current efforts in that direction, despite the difficulties.

The aim of the OECD international migration data initiative is, ultimately, to obtain as full an accounting as possible of international migration flows, including both short- and long-term movements. In the first instance, attention is directed at inflows of foreign nationals, which tend to be movements of most interest for policy.

C. INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

The OECD project on the integration of immigrants into the labour market reviews current integration policies in the OECD countries. The topic of the integration of immigrants, however, is not a

new one. Immigrants at all times and places have had to adapt to the host country and vice versa. The nature of the integration process has differed from country to country and over time, depending on the migration history of the country, the circumstances of arrival, the existing programmes in place to assist immigrants upon arrival and the general social and economic conditions in the country. The issue seems pressing now because of the large number of immigrants that have entered OECD countries during the past 15 years, because integration results do not seem to be as favourable in a number of countries in recent years as they were in the past and because many countries expect that a recourse to further immigration may be necessary in the near future.

In 2007 the OECD released the volume “Jobs for immigrants: Labour market integration in Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden”, which contained an overview of the labour market integration of immigrants in these countries. This volume was the first in a series of reviews that will also cover Belgium, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Each review will include a preliminary diagnosis of the labour market integration of immigrants and in some cases, of children of immigrants, in the country, as well as particular national features that affect the integration process. A history of recent immigration and integration policies is also presented along with an overview of the framework for integration policy, the national stakeholders and the particular measures and initiatives addressed to immigrants or, in some cases, targeted at broader groups but where immigrants are overrepresented. Indeed, it is generally the case that, aside from special programmes addressed to recently-arrived immigrants, labour market difficulties experienced by immigrants are normally dealt with through mainstream labour market programmes.

The preliminary diagnosis in each review will be extended with a look at the evolution of immigrant outcomes over the recent past, with attention to the nature of migration flows, the effect of policy initiatives and in particular of introduction programmes, the recognition of foreign qualifications and experience, the labour market and discrimination. The reviews end with an overall summary with recommendations. A seminar was held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 15 June 2007 to discuss first results of this project³.

D. INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

In recent years, concerns about growing shortages of health professionals, in particular doctors and nurses have emerged in OECD countries. These shortages are projected to increase over the next 20 years, unless countermeasures are taken. Population ageing and changing technologies are likely to contribute to an increase in the demand for health workers, while workforce ageing will decrease the supply as the baby boom generation of health workers reaches retirement age. One way to partially meeting such shortages is via international migration of health workers, a way which is already being utilized in OECD countries.

In this context, there is increasing competition between OECD countries to attract and retain highly-skilled workers in general, and health professionals in particular. This raises concerns in both sending and receiving countries. In the case of developing countries, these concerns were set out in the World Health Report 2006–Working Together for Health of WHO. Recently, several international initiatives have been set up to formulate policy recommendations to overcome the global health workforce crisis, including through the elaboration of codes of conduct governing the international recruitment of health workers. However, evidence on the international mobility of health professionals remains scarce and limited, if not anecdotal. This lack of evidence has given rise to much misunderstanding of a complex phenomenon and has hindered the development of effective policy responses. Hence, it is vital to develop reliable and comparable data to evaluate the role of international mobility in shaping the health workforce in OECD countries and its impact on origin countries.

The key objective of this joint OECD and WHO project is to present a comprehensive and relevant picture of immigrants in the health sector in OECD countries in order to better inform the policy dialogue at national and international levels. It also aims at better understanding the interaction between migration policies and policies on education, recruitment and retention of health workers.

A special chapter in the 2007 edition of the International Migration Outlook focused on migrant health workers in OECD countries by place of birth using population censuses and population registers. The chapter also explored recent trends and policies including procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications. In addition to this publication, a number of in-depth case studies have been carried out focusing on France, Italy, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (another one should be soon completed on Canada), and the results from these studies have been summarized in a document entitled “How can OECD countries achieve a sustainable health workforce? The role of education, international migration and health workforce management policies” (OECD Working Paper forthcoming 2008).

E. HORIZONTAL PROJECT ON MANAGING LABOUR MIGRATION TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH:
CHALLENGES FOR OECD MIGRATION, EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

At the request of the Secretary-General of the OECD, the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs is developing a two-year horizontal project on Managing Labour Migration to Support Economic Growth. This project focuses on how to recruit both lower and higher skilled workers and how to organize their inflow in order to satisfy domestic labour market requirements while making the best use of immigrant skills. The purpose is to ensure that returns of those who have been admitted as temporary workers are actually realized to redirect irregular movements into legal channels and to minimize the potential adverse impacts of long-term, low-skilled migration on receiving countries as well as the departure of higher skilled migrants on origin countries.

In connection with this project, the issue of how destination countries can best make use of the skills of immigrants which they accept for settlement, in particular more highly educated immigrants is being considered. This proposed research will take place in the context of “overqualification” among a certain percentage of immigrants in many countries, that is, of immigrants occupying posts for which they appear to be formally overqualified.

Another area of work concerns return migration of international migrants. Currently, there is little empirical information in this area, both regarding the extent of these movements and the characteristics of persons who eventually leave the country to which they have migrated. Some return to their country of origin and some, it is believed, move on to a different destination. Still others return because they have difficulty in finding jobs in host countries or because they have left their families behind. But there is little cross-country information on how many people who have immigrated eventually return to their origin countries and why they do so. Because it is expected that some future migration movements will be temporary, some information is necessary if effective policies are to be developed to foster such movements. Information about return movements is also necessary in order to design appropriate policies for highly qualified immigrants who will not negatively impact development possibilities in origin countries. Several case studies have been commissioned focusing on selected origin countries. A conference on return migration is scheduled for early 2008.

The next meeting of the OECD Working Party on Migration (19-20 June 2008) will be held in the Netherlands following a seminar on managing labour migration of the highly-skilled co-organized by the OECD and the Dutch authorities from 18 to 19 June 2008.

F. ANNUAL TOKYO WORKSHOP ON MIGRATION AND LABOUR MARKETS IN ASIA

The thirteenth edition of the workshop on International migration and labour markets, held in Tokyo under the auspices of the Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training (JILPT) on 16 March 2007, continued the discussions of the 2004 workshop where the focus had not been solely on Asia but included migration and labour markets beyond that continent. While the 2004 workshop had also included economies in Northern America and Australasia, the 2007 workshop focused on Europe, with the objective of examining if and how Asian economies could learn from the current experience of Europe. Discussions underlined that no single pattern of managing migration in Europe existed, but that there were some converging trends, such as more skilled migration and development of procedures to attract and retain highly-skilled workers. In the case of Asia, the importance of ethnic migration, irregular movements and movements of trainees was mentioned. Focusing on the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, Province of China, the role of international markets for brides in establishing more permanent migration channels was also discussed.

NOTES

- ¹ See: <http://www.oecd.org>.
- ² See: Lemaître George, Thomas Liebig, Cécile Thoreau and Pauline Fron (2007). *Standardized statistics on immigrant inflows results, sources and methods* for further details see www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/29/38832099.pdf.
- ³ See: http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en_2649_37415_38865678_1_1_1_37415,00.html.

REFERENCES

- Dumont Jean-Christophe, John P. Martin and Gilles Speilvogel (2007). Women on the Move: The Neglected Gender Dimension of the Brain Drain, for a first exploitation of the database on the gender dimension of highly skilled migration. *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, No. 2920. Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour.
- Lemaître, George (2005). The Comparability of International Migration Statistics, Problems and Prospects, *OECD StatBrief*, No. 9. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2007). *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 1): Labour Market Integration in Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- _____ (forthcoming). *How can OECD countries achieve a sustainable health workforce? The role of education, international migration and health workforce management policies*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- United Nations (1998). *Recommendations on statistics of international migration, Revision 1*. Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 58, Rev. 1. United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98. XVII.14.
- World Health Organization (2006). *World Health Report 2006. Working together for health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.